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LOUISIANA MOSS CROP.

Increased Supply Keeps Step with Increased Demand.

A Growing Industry Peculiar to the Creole State—The Picturesque Moss Pickers—Burying Moss to "Cure" It.

[Special New Orleans (La.) Letter.]

"Spanish moss" is one of the growing industries of Louisiana. Strangely, it does not thrive so luxuriantly beyond the limits of the state. It flourishes most in southwestern Louisiana, the "swampy region," including the Techi region, or Acadian country, the Atchafalaya basin, and in the lakes and bayous of the Gross Tete, Lafourche, Terrebonne and Borataria regions, in the "swamp" in the rear of the city of New Orleans, and in the picturesque bayou Castaign.

This industry gives employment to about 5,000 people, mainly negroes,

A MOSS TREE.

divided into two classes—"wood choppers" and "moss pickers." During the summer months, when the crops are "laid by," they go into the dismal swamps, pushing their crooked ways along through "canals," ditches and bayous, in pirogues, skiffs, canoes or rafts, picking up from the dark green waters all of the flakes and bunches of moss that the winds have blown down from the huge Spanish oaks that stand like specters in the watery forest of solitude. Each picker has a long pole with an iron hook at the end, and, after he has gathered the floating bunches, he reaches up into the trees and pulls down from the heavily-laden branches the long, thick bunches that hang from the limbs in such wild confusion, wreathed artistically by the hand of nature.

The pickers then climb the heavily-laden trees, walk along the numerous branches, picking the flakes of moss and throwing them down into the boats. When the boats have been loaded, the men pull for the shore, where they have a "camp." The mass is piled in heaps and water is thrown upon it, where it swelters in the sun, until the men have dug long trenches, into which the moss is thrown, wet down, and earth thrown over it. Here it remains buried for two or three months. This "kills" or "cures" it, without which it is not a marketable commodity. The burying process kills the outside bark of the moss, thus making it soft and flexible. Were it not for this process our beds, chairs, sofas and carriage seats would not be so soft and pleasant.

Louisiana moss is a "live" plant, it feeds on air, and not from any substance derived from the live oak or Spanish oak on which it is found. It only needs the tree for an elevated position to get air. It feeds on the malaria of the swamps, somewhat purifying the air and making it healthful for the pickers who are gathering it to be buried. It dies as soon as the tree dies, however, because the bark of the tree among which its tendrils creep has decayed and peeled off. The moss then turns black, as if draped in mourning for its benefactor. This article is called "black moss," and is graded in commerce as second class.

The prime article, or living moss, is of a gray greenish color, having long branching fibers, with trumpet shaped flowers of a peach blossom color. It grows rapidly, and it seems not to have a root, as a straw blown from one tree to another soon grows into a thick bunch. Its element is on the tops and branches of living trees in the darkest swamps where sunshine rarely enters, covering as with a mantle the tops and huge limbs of the herculean trees that rise up in their glowing grandeur in these almost impenetrable lakes and bayous. It is a creature of the fickle winds and is blown from the oaks and cypress to the highlands adjacent to the swamps, and finds lodgment in the sweet gum, elm and ash, and covers them as a fringe, or as the background of a gloomy picture, with its long pennants and festoons, solemnly swaying in the wind, remindful of the waving black plumes of a long procession of hearses.

The moss along the margins of these lakes and bayous is gathered by "woodchoppers." The men fell the trees and the picking is much easier. It is piled up in heaps and finally buried, then, after it has been "cured," according to the usual calculation, it is dug up, scattered along on posts and trenches and dried. It is then hauled to market, or to the nearest "store," where it is baled, or tied up, in a rather loose manner, in bales of from 300 to 500 pounds, as it seems convenient, and shipped to the commission merchant at New Orleans. Each "gang" of "pickers" and "choppers" has a camp, where they live or sleep at nights, during the picking season.

The houses are of the most primitive style of architecture—unhewn logs, with a one-sided roof of clapboards, slanting from the ridge pole to within ten feet of the ground.

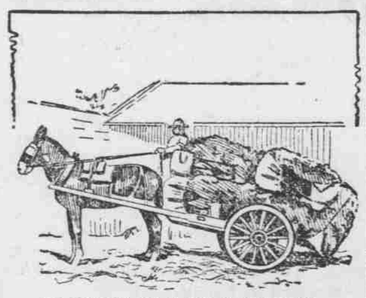
The baling process is also primitive. Mule power is used, and sometimes hand power. The "press" is a log lever put into a mortice in a large tree. Of course the baling is very crude, but the darky only wishes it to last until he can haul it to "de town." The bale is fastened on each side by cypress boards in the rough, bound with wire, vines, or hickory bark. A picker gathers from 250 to 400 or 500 pounds a day, and as each day's "catch" is buried separately, it is also baled separately when dug up, and this accounts for the bales of all sizes coming to market.

Moss loses about half of its original weight on being cured. The picker gets from 1½ to 2¾ cents a pound, but his day's work of 400 pounds has shrunk to about 200 pounds on being "killed," yet this is good pay, and enables the darky and his family to live in clover during the picking season.

The country store-keeper ships the moss to the commission merchant, or factory, of which latter there are four in New Orleans, and, it is believed, the only moss factories in the south, as moss is not a paying merchantable commodity anywhere except in Louisiana, although moss is found in small quantities in the swamps of all the gulf states, but not in paying quantities.

At the factory these rough bales are opened, and the leaves, dust and small sticks taken out by a process of ginning, similar to that of ginning cotton. It is then put through a boiling process, in a mixture of sulphate of iron, or copperas. The process fixes the tannin in the bark, turning the moss into a glossy black. The moss is then dried, and sometimes recleansed by another ginning. It is then classified into four grades: Gray, brown and gray, brown and black, and pure black. The pure black is the more valuable, being softer and more flexible, and is sometimes sold in the north as the finest quality of "horse hair."

In this refined condition the moss sells at from seven to twelve cents per pound. When the picker ships direct to the factory, without curing by burying, he receives from 25 to 50 cents per hundred pounds. Many of them do this, rather than to cure the moss by burying it, and waiting two or three months for it to die. They mainly ship by steamboat, which is very much cheaper than by rail, and many of them float down the bayous or creeks on flatboats into the Mississippi, thence to New Orleans, where their cargoes are sold, and their purchases of calicoes, provisions, etc., are made. But, too frequently, these needed purchases are omitted, and the pickers fall in among the dens of colored thieves in the negro quarter, where they are stripped of their earnings as they have denuded the trees of the swamps.



IN FRONT OF A MOSS PICKERY.

The receipts of moss average about 100 bales daily, or about 30,000 pounds. The factories put up the moss in quarter bales of 100 pounds, and in half bales of 200 pounds, which are known as "machine-cured moss," and is shipped to the principal cities of the United States, also France and Germany, where it is used in all kinds of upholstery in which hair is used. Notwithstanding the increased and increasing demand for Louisiana, or Spanish, moss, the supply seems to increase. Pickers state that it seems to be more plentiful than ever, as if its growth were increased by the annual thinning out of the moss forests. The demand is greater this season than ever, and it promises to supplant the use of hair.

There is not an object of nature, perhaps, more solemn and impressive than a dismal, moss-covered swamp. As one glides along the waters darkened by the deep shadows of the mossy cavern of dependent mosses, remindful of stalactites in a cave, the tall cypress and Spanish oaks rise above in their grandeur and solemnity like giant sentinels guarding their dismal abode as if to shut out the sun and make it one of perpetual darkness and solitude.

J. M. SCANLAND.

Seizing the Opportunity.

Little Billee (explaining)—In an affair of this kind, you see, a large man has a great advantage. Now, you take a small man like me—

Miss O'Farrell—Oh, Mr. Baghot. This is so sudden.—Brooklyn Life.

Woman's Cruelty.

May—I hear that Mr. Nendick had a tragedy in his life.

Jess—Yes. He got engaged to a girl at the seaside and she held him to his promise.—Truth.

ON A ROMAN RACE COURSE.

The King and Queen at the Royal Derby at the Italian Capital.

One Sunday afternoon I paid the sum of ten cents admission to the grounds of the race course at the Capannelle. Apart from the interest excited by the programme of the horse contest announced to take place, and the charm and scenic beauty of the spot, and the historic memories associated with the immediate neighborhood, there was the distinct attraction, put forward on posters in letters two feet high, that King Humbert and Queen Margherita would assist at these races. Indeed, one of the "corse" might be regarded as specially belonging to the king, the "Derby Reale," or Royal Derby, to which he gives annually the sum of forty-eight hundred dollars.

As the visitor enters the grounds by a tree-shaded passage, brilliant with white and scarlet azaleas and banksia roses of rare fragrance falling over the wall of verdure his steps are arrested by a shrill sound of a trumpet call. This sound is answered in the distance, "the alarms and excursions" of Shakespeare, and then the delightful fanfare, which Rosina wrote as introduction to the Italian royal march, breaks upon the ear, and everyone knows that royalty is approaching.

A wagonette drove by two fine-looking horses comes in sight, and the plainly-dressed gentleman wearing the tall silk hat, who drives so deftly, who is so easily recognizable by his portraits, by his large rolling eye and his thick bushy mustache, all white, is Humbert, king of Italy. There is no display of force; a few armed policemen are seen here and there in this passage to the race grounds, but they never interrupt the view, and you may count the wrinkles in the royal face, if you will, as this very constitutional king is whirled past. It is true that at the turn of the road which leads here, and at intervals on the new Appian way by which royalty drives, there are gendarmes and guards of public security grouped in considerable numbers.

More trumpet sounding, answered in the distance, and Queen Margherita's carriage drives up. It is preceded by an outrider in flaming vermillion livery. The driver and footman of the royal carriage are in the same conspicuous-hued liveries, and the coachman wears a white wig of unapproachable elegance. The queen looks very pretty and comfortable as she reclines in her carriage holding a gay parasol over her head. Her tiny mantle of cream-colored white, with sprays of gold, forms a harmonic contrast with her fair healthy complexion that adds to the charm and beauty attributed to her. As she approaches the royal stand and ascends it you hear a respectably low murmur of voices, and the applause has a muffled sound from the daintily-gloved hands from which it proceeds. There is no enthusiasm, no cheering; the populace, which have paid ten cents per person entry money, have something else to occupy themselves with to-day.

The races are not epoch-making. They never are nowadays in Italy. Twelve horses start in the Royal Derby. There is a momentary enthusiasm exhibited by the crowd and the inmates of the royal stand and the two adjoining stands become interested, and the voice of the bookmaker is, like the voice of conscience heard above all other noises. The ways and manners of the turf in Italy differ but little from those of other lands. As races they are undoubtedly inferior to those of England, Australia and the United States. As a rule all the horses are ridden by English jockeys, but the horses are not at all equal to those of other lands where horse-racing is a fine art accompanied with the possible acquirement of wealth.

In the intervals between the races the king would come forward to the balustrade of the royal stand, over which floated the Italian tri-color, and there converse with his acquaintances, from whom, in outward show or apparent dignity, he in no way differed. The proverbial cat that may look at a king would have had his fill of gazing at monarchy had he been here. The queen was not visible. She held a sort of reception in the inner chambers of this royal stand, and probably found that more to her taste than watching the maneuvers on the turf, for which she probably cares very little.—Balti more Sun.

THE FOOD OF ROYALTY.

Some of the Favorite Dishes of European Monarchs.

A dish that is almost certain to lead the way on a queen's menu is a kind of oatmeal soup. The wine served with it is white sherry, which her majesty generally drinks from a beautiful gold cup formerly belonging to Queen Anne. Boiled beef and pickled cucumbers—a favorite dish with Prince Albert—invariably follow the soup, while a baron of beef is likewise a constant feature. It is noteworthy that the queen still adheres to the old practice of having the cook's name called out as each dish is brought to the table. This custom dates back to the days of George II., and had its origin in a conspiracy against one Weston, formerly an assistant, whom the king had raised to the dignity of chief "mouth cook." His late comrades, jealous of his preferment, endeavored to disgrace him by tampering with the dishes. Upon Weston proving the existence of this plot to his royal master, the latter gave orders that in future, as each dish was brought on, the name of its cook should be called out, in order that praise or blame might be bestowed where due.

In strong distinction to Queen Victoria's tastes are those of another royal lady—Queen Margaret of Italy. The latter's tastes incline specially towards olives and cakes fried in oil. When the royal guests consists exclusively of Italians, none but national dishes are served, spaghetti garlic, onions, and oil, forming the chief components of the meal. Both the king and queen of Italy are especially fond of fritto—a terrible compound of artichokes, chickens' livers, calves' brains and cocks' combs.

The grand duchess of Baden prides herself on her coffee, which she prepares in a Russian coffee-pot with her own hands. Her husband, on the other hand, grows his own wine, and is his own cellar-master. His favorite dish is lentil soup, made toothsome with a little vinegar, and Frankfort sausages; while his wife is extremely fond of sweetmeats.

At King Oscar of Sweden's table a national dish consisting of raw salmon preserved in earth is almost invariably to be found. There is likewise a curious soup composed mainly of barley and whipped cream. No waste is allowed, and once a week the remainders of roasts are hashed, formed into balls and fried in oil. This dish is served on large silver platters, the borders of which are garnished with fried eggs.

The emperor of Austria especially affects spaetzle (a national dish somewhat resembling macaroni) and apple wine, while the Empress Elizabeth is extremely fond of sweets of all kinds. As a rule, however, her food consists of cold meats, fruits, the juice of raw beefsteaks, and tea. Her majesty is extremely partial to Bavarian "Knoedels," but does not venture to indulge in that delicacy, for fear of its influence on her figure, of which, as is well known, she is very proud.—Cassell's Journal.

FRENCH USE OUR WORDS.

But They Seldom Spell or Pronounce Them Correctly.

The United States has added its special quota of words adopted into modern French. For instance, they speak of "le sleeping car" and of going "sans snow boots." The crowds who join the police chasing the bomb throwers invariably cry "Lynchez-le, lynchez-le!"

The expression "le struggle for life," which they are so fond of using, bears the American stamp. But they are never quite so pleased as when they bring out with great gusto: "Times is money." They refer to us humorously as "L'Oncle Sam," their usual attitude toward us, for though they are amiably inclined, they do not as yet take us seriously.

Often their reason for adopting English words is that the sound amuses them, sending them into gales of laughter; as, for instance, the word picnic, which they spell "piquenique," thereby adding a new charm, a kind of French style to its uncouthness. "C'est tres shocking," they laughingly say, in derision of their English-speaking visitors, who must so often use that word in Paris. "High life" is a favorite expression of theirs, but they pronounce it to rhyme with fig leaf.

Often they quote us where there are equivalent French words, simply because it sounds piquant, as when the students in the Latin Quarter call their sweethearts "darling," or in this sentence in a story, "En Angleterre il y a beaucoup de little children dans les nursery."

They are beginning to prefer our word gentleman almost to their own, but use it not so much in its original fine meaning, but rather to indicate a showily-dressed man. I seems strange that they should not adopt our word home, but they sometimes make a wild dash at originality and speak of "les homesick."

It seems like an indication of provincialism that, with English-speaking people so accessible these quotations should so often be incorrect. Music is spelled "mousic," and stout and whisky rendered "stout en witsky." They form the plurals, too, in their own way, and say "ices cream" and "leaders writers."—Leslie's Weekly.

Dr. Lewis Upon Footgear.

Mrs. Lewis has furnished some hitherto unpublished manuscripts of Dr. Dio Lewis upon footgear. The renowned hygienist said that the ankle should not be closely fitted, because a ligature about the blood vessels, muscles and tendons must produce weakness. Cloth uppers should be worn in warm weather, because the porous texture permits evaporation and cools the feet. Rubbers should not be worn except under most exceptional circumstances, because they produce tenderness. Walking he regarded as a most important means of health, and he said that shoes should be such as to permit easy walking and good circulation. So long as women walk on the same earth as men, Dr. Lewis said, their stockings and boots should be as thick and warm. Dr. Lewis advised that children should be allowed to run in the garden without shoes in summer, "with their feet in loving contact with the bosom of mother earth."—Journal of Hygiene.

→The five civilized tribes are the Cherokees, with a population of 29,599; Chickasaws, 7,182; Choctaws, 14,397; Creeks, 14,632; Seminoles, 2,561.

MALICIOUS.

YOUNG PHYSICIAN—This morning I was called to see my first patient.

HIS FRIEND (a lawyer)—Let me congratulate you. If he desires to make a will you will, of course, recommend *me*.—Fliegende Blaetter.

No Danger.

"Darling," she murmured, in one of those fits of soulful sentimentality common to her, "if I should die first, you would never, never marry again, would you?"

"I?" he replied with a look of infinite earnestness in his eyes and a decided tone in his voice; "I marry again? Never!"

And she smiled and was satisfied.—St. Louis Republic.

A DIFFICULT POINT.

Marion—Oh, Laura! I don't know what to do. Fred has promised that he will stop drinking if I will marry him, and Charlie says he'll take to drink if I don't marry him.—Judy.

Taken Up.

He (at 11:30 p. m.)—Are you ever troubled with insomnia?

She (wearily)—Yes, very often.

He—I have heard that walking in the open air before retiring is beneficial.

She (hopefully)—Let's try it! You do the walking and I'll retire.—Life.

Asking the Impossible.

"You will have to get somebody to identify you," said the paying teller.

"But that's impossible!" exclaimed the presenter of the check. "Since I've had this check in my possession I've been so proud that my own mother wouldn't know me."—Boston Transcript.

High Life Diplomacy.

Pastor—Do you set your daughter a good example, Mrs. Hauton?

Mrs. Hauton—Don't I, indeed? I call her into the room every time John and I have a row. I don't want her to repeat the blunder that I made in spoiling a husband.—N. Y. World.

Not to Be Thwarted.

He—Did you know there were microbes in kisses?

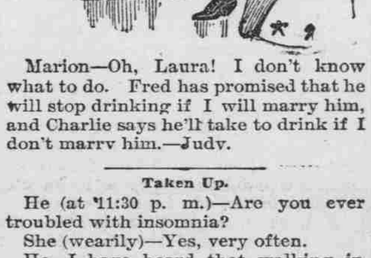
She—That's all right, Charley. The young man I had last summer said there was poison in ice cream, too, but it didn't scare me one bit.—Detroit Free Press.

Very True.

That bridal pairs are not like other pears
Is a fact you've doubtless seen.
Why are they not? Because, you know the dears
Are softest when they're green.

—Truth.

COMMERCIAL TERM.



Some successful Eastern drummers.—Art in Dressing.

Dreadful Realism.

The Painter—I've got a commission to paint a picture entitled "The Madman's Nightmare." Where in thunder shall I find a subject?

His Friend—Why don't you make a picture of some of those bicycle bloomers?—Chicago Record.

Too Late.

The house had been aroused by a burglar. Mr. Jones saw a man with a mask going through the pockets of his pantaloons, and, quick as thought, he shot at him, the intruder making good his escape.

"Why," asked Mrs. Jones, thoroughly awake, "what did you scare me for?"

"I saw a man robbing my pockets and fired at him."

"Well, he didn't get anything," said she, complacently.

"How do you know?"

"O, I tried 'em myself before we went to bed."—Adams Freeman.

An Unpleasant Meeting.

Patrick Ragan had a face on him that, as he had once remarked himself, was an "offince to the landscape." Next to his homeliness his poverty was the most conspicuous part of him. An Irish neighbor met him recently, when the following colloquy ensued:

"An' how are ye, Pat?"

"Moighty bad, intoirely. It's shtarvation that's shtarin' me in the face."

"Is that so? Sure, an' it can't be very pleasant for ayther of yez."—Richmond Dispatch.

Not Till Then?

When the buttons on my vest
Tear themselves away,
And the spots upon my coat
Proclaim they've come to stay,
When my socks all run to holes
And everything's agee,
Then, dear wife, so far away,
I fondly think of thee.

—N. Y. World.

Preferred His Own Method.

Doctor—I told you plainly that you should rub the brandy that I ordered for you about your stomach, and now you have drunk it.

Patient—Yes, but you see, doctor, I have never in my life cared much for externals.—Fliegende Blaetter.

HE ACCOUNTED FOR IT.

"Are you the man of the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where's your wife?"

"Dead, sir.

"I thought so."—St. Louis Republic.

A Left-Handed Compliment.

"That woman dispenses a great deal of social lemonade."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that she is always saying sour things in a sweet way."—Boston Gazette.

Possibly True.

She—Here is the story of a man who says he never made love to a girl in his life. Do you believe it?

He—It may be true. Some fellows make a specialty of widows, you know.—Indianapolis Journal.

Comparative Antiquity.

"Mrs. Cashman has ceased to notice Mrs. Jones-Brown. Do you know why?"

"It is because her son-in-law's family is so very much older than the family of Mrs. Jones-Brown's son-in-law."—Life.

Important.

Jess—This clairvoyant can tell the present, past and future from a lock of my hair.

Bess—I should think she would need to have the present, past and future shades of your hair.—Puck.

Not Fatal.

"Tommy fainted at the club the other night. We thought he was going to die."

"Well, did he kick the bucket?"

"No; he only turned a little pale."—Truth.